

# 1. Tasmanian genesis

'It started – as always, with him – in Tasmania'

*Roland Wilson*

## Giblin

3.00 pm, 2 March 1951, Hobart. The cremation of Lyndhurst Falkiner Giblin. This is a ceremony without Christian rites. Instead of a priest – Giblin could not abide a 'parson' at his funeral – a Norwegian economist friend gives the homily. The god-fearing relatives of the Giblin clan glower from the benches. From the gramophone sounds a Bach Fugue treasured by Giblin. His brother reads from Tennyson's *Ulysses*,

I cannot rest from travel ...

Beyond the utmost bound of human thought

Thus passes the mortal frame of L. F. Giblin, one of Australia's great originals. Warrior, sage, and peacemaker; explorer, politician and poetaster; rationalist, stoic and mystery – the strange hero of an unexpected tale.

The Australia that Giblin departed in 1951 was much changed from the one he entered on 29 November 1872. Until the end of that year all news of the outside world still came to Australia by ship. Truganini lived in Macquarie Street, Hobart. Convicts guarded by Red Coats still laboured in nearby Port Arthur. No child was required to attend school in any part of Australia. The continent was a brood of six jealous colonies. Midday was differently observed in Hobart, Melbourne and Sydney; dozens of different bank notes circulated; and six miniature colonial armies and navies kept guard against indistinct threats.

By the time of Giblin's death a single federal government had by design, expedience and rude hammering been forged from the colonies, and now contentedly assumed all the prerogatives of sovereign power. On a rabbit-ridden, treeless plain a national capital had been raised. A national university endowed. A central bank created. And economics – which at the time of Giblin's birth had been a matter of words (speeches, and volumes) – had now become a matter of numbers (statistics, 'multipliers'); people (students, professors, chief economists); and institutions (departments, bureaus, treasuries). A discipline had been spawned and its senior members took an eminent place in the counsels of the newly created state. That discipline was thick with Giblin's former students, present colleagues, and protégés. This was his bequest.

Giblin's inheritance will help us to understand his bequest.

In 1827 Giblin's great-grandfather, Robert Wilkins Giblin, had arrived in Hobart Town on the *Sir Charles Forbes* in the company of his eight children and 73

female convicts. Robert Wilkins stepped ashore a ruined man. The school he had run in England had failed in the banking crash of 1825. He was starting again, the hard way. He would do what he did his entire life: teach. Within a few weeks he had opened a school that promised 'frequent lectures on Astronomy, the mechanical powers, hydraulics, pneumatics, electricity, chemistry, etc., etc.'. A surer means of income was found when Lt-Gov. Arthur made him principal of the new Kings Orphan School, a school created by the benevolent patronage of the Governor. Another outlet of Giblin's energies was the new Hobart Mechanics Institute, also patronised by Arthur. Giblin taught with 'success'.<sup>1</sup>

What we see in the great-grandfather are three poles of attraction in his great grandson: science, education, and youth. A fourth pole – public service in public life – only becomes apparent in later generations. Robert Wilkins's son, Thomas, fathered Edward Owen Giblin (1849–95), who fought in miniature the battle for sanitation undertaken by Edwin Chadwick in London in the preceding generation. When Edward Owen was appointed Health Officer to Hobart Town, the Hobart Rivulet was a sewer – both literally and officially. And the prevailing system of cesspits spelt typhoid and diphtheria. Edward Owen recommended the prohibition of cesspits to the City Council and the introduction of night soil removal and sewers. The Alderman resisted. The Alderman yielded. The *Public Health (Hobart) Act* of 1884 phased out cesspits. Edward Owen could later report that, in one particular row of 15 tenements where typhoid had appeared regularly, it was now 'banished'.

Edward Owen also maintained a busy medical practice. It is presumably out of a debt to Edward Owen in some matter of life and limb that a Hobart schoolmaster decided in 1884 to christen his youngest son, Edward Owen Giblin Shann (1884-1935). Fifty years later, when Australia struggled for breath in the Depression, Edward Owen Giblin Shann and L. F. Giblin were invested with an equal trust to advise on the relief of the economy. This is how one of the most renowned economists of the 1930s Australia bore, as an unlikely middle name, the surname of the most renown.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This is the judgement of Mowle (1943). It is not the judgement of all. At Newtown a committee of Giblin's determined adversaries composed an indictment against him, and stretched themselves to include the charge that Giblin had allowed his pupils to gather wood alone, and thereby be exposed to communication with convicts. Giblin was, however, also charged with striking a boy 'six times right and left with his doubled fist about the head and face' (Robson 1983, p. 283). Giblin had no effective reply to this accusation. He was dismissed in 1832. The family's interpretation of these events is provided in W.W. Giblin (1945).

<sup>2</sup> Shann and Giblin were to work together, notably in preparing the 'Premiers' Plan', but they were not close. Shann in Giblin's view was 'too much of a clever talker'. In 1935 Giblin blandly wrote to

Robert Wilkins Giblin had also fathered a William Giblin. His son William Robert Giblin (1840–87) became Attorney-general, Treasurer, Premier, Chief-justice of Tasmania – and father of Lyndhurst Falkiner Giblin.<sup>3</sup> This son was christened ‘Lyndhurst’, in an unexpected – even eccentric – tribute to the Lord Chancellor of the Wellington and Peel governments, Lord Lyndhurst.<sup>4</sup> The ‘Falkiner’ commemorated William Robert’s mother who died shortly after William Robert’s birth.

From the beginning of his adult life William Robert had been ‘dedicated to the moral and social elevation of the underprivileged’. He was president and founder of the Hobart Working Men’s Club. He promoted football leagues to fight larrikinism and vandalism. He taught in the Sunday School. He won the goodwill of Hobart, and with that, won a seat in the House of Assembly. He became Premier for a total of 67 months in two periods between 1878–84 and provided the first spell of stable government the colony had enjoyed. As Premier he was beyond the call of any single interest and drew talent wherever he could find it (including one of the architects of Federation, Andrew Inglis Clark). A ‘liberal by conviction, in sympathy with [the] English advanced Liberal Party’ (Walker 1976, p. 8), William Robert broadened the franchise and restrained expenditure. His horizons were expansive for an introverted colony and he pressed the merit of annexing Papua on an indifferent Tasmanian public. London’s disapproval of this project prompted the formation of the Federal Council of 1883 – one

his wife, Eilean, ‘You heard of course of Shann’s death – I forget if I commented on it. The reports were rather obscure, but it seems pretty certain that he killed himself – threw himself from the window’ (RBA LFG 3 July 1935). In the same letter, Giblin spends some emotion on the death of one of his student peers at Cambridge, William Harrison Moore (1867–1935), the diplomat and constitutional lawyer who had a major role in shaping the Statute of Westminster.

<sup>3</sup> William Robert Giblin’s first son was William Leslie Giblin (1867–1901), who died in the service of US Army Medical Corps. The third son, Alan Vincent, followed his father’s career in law. He served in the Boer War and it is said that it is his likeness that features in the Boer War Memorial Statue in Hobart.

<sup>4</sup> A son of an American artist, Lord Lyndhurst was a wrangler at Cambridge, who first came to public notice in 1817 in defending the would-be revolutionist ‘Dr’ James Watson from charges of high treason. Lyndhurst, at that point, was a republican, even ‘jacobin’, but, as a result of his trial performance the Tories discovered his merit, and apparently soon after, he theirs. He was awarded a series of legal positions by Tory governments, and keenly defended all their reactionary measures. He combined this with a strenuous support of the admission of Jews into parliament and the rights of women. In his eighties Lyndhurst occupied himself with kite flying and translating the Greek Fathers on the topic of divorce. Perhaps one may detect in this choice an attraction to the eccentric that was conspicuous in his son, but not otherwise manifested in the father’s sturdy self-presentation.

landmark in the journey to Federation – and Giblin represented Tasmania. Alfred Deakin, in retrospect, judged Giblin as ‘too big for the colony’.<sup>5</sup>

With his brilliant intellect, elevated character, and public standing, William Robert Giblin must have been an extraordinary – perhaps overwhelming – example to the young Lyndhurst.<sup>6</sup>

But Giblin’s father and forefathers also unwittingly endowed Giblin with one pole of disapproval – formal religion. Robert Wilkins was a godly man. And he raised in his sons the same consciousness. One witness of Thomas Giblin’s household in the 1870s recalled: ‘Religious instruction was strictly observed by family prayers every morning, at which the whole family and staff attended, and regular attendance at Church twice every Sunday’ (Giblin 1945). Thomas’s brother William was a deacon in the Congregational church. William’s son, William Robert, once won £10 for a poem on the conversion of St Paul ‘in a well contested competition’, and was active in the affairs in the same faith as his father. Those were confident days in the history of Australian Congregationalism, a denomination founded in Tasmania in 1823, and by now extended to all colonies, claiming James Fairfax (of the *Sydney Morning Herald*) amongst its brethren. This Australian Congregationalism was robustly evangelical, scriptural and proud of its affinity with the obstinate Puritan dissidents of earlier centuries.

Befitting his upbringing, Giblin ‘knew his Bible well’ (Earp 1960);<sup>7</sup> there are numerous biblical allusions in the writings of Giblin. But almost all of them are ironical. Raised a Bible-Christian, Giblin became at some point a sceptic, a scoffer, an atheist. There seems to have been no particular occasion for this drastic transition. Certainly, he was not personally made for Puritanism – enjoyment came too easily to him. Late in life he recalled from his childhood a tiny act of moral rebellion. At a public banquet held at his home and presided over by his father: ‘we [Giblin children] lurked in the background and devoured countless jellies, and after the cousins had withdrawn I shocked the virtuous cousins by

<sup>5</sup> The climax of William Robert’s career was his 90-minute address to the House of Assembly in 1884 recommending the House’s assent to a Federation Resolution. It reads well today. One witness recorded: ‘It had to my mind the tone of the speech of an English Cabinet Minister, in the House of Commons, than the sort one is accustomed to from Australian politicians, even the most eminent’ (Walker 1976, p. 2).

<sup>6</sup> Not to mention William Robert’s apple orcharding, strenuous physical exertion and love of poetry, all perennials in his son’s life.

<sup>7</sup> Giblin once passed judgement on the Book of Judges (8: 4–8), where Gideon is instructed to choose every man that ‘lappeth of the water with his tongue as a dog lappeth’. ‘Men do not, in fact, lap with their tongues, as dogs lap, in any circumstances’ (Giblin in Copland 1960, p. 143).

draining the wine cups, some of them left half full'.<sup>8</sup> He chided his sister: 'From what little I understand of Christianity I should say that the spirit that prefers reading the bible to giving innocent enjoyment to children is not Christian' (RBA LFG 18 June 1892).

In the larger picture, Congregationalism was to go into a general decline during Giblin's lifetime. And Giblin found in the mainstream of Protestantism nothing more satisfactory.<sup>9</sup> More generally, historians of religion have stressed that around the time of Giblin's birth in 1872, 'God died'. Giblin was one particle of the surge of 'liberalism and modernism' and *fin-de-siecle* 'paganism'. His rebellion against formal religion was an important element in his anti-Victorianism.

But Giblin's spiritual education left one deep imprint: the ethic of selflessness. It was said of him that, although 'he hated religion', 'there was no one more "christian" in his outlook than he was ... He was always ready to help and never asked for a reward' (Hytten 1951). It was this ethic that prompted him once to expostulate: 'The ego, the distempered devil of the self ... There is the enemy' (Giblin in Copland 1960, p. 129). It was the ethic that incited him to hail George Borrow – of *The Bible in Spain* – 'as a kindred spirit' (Earp 1960, p.15). It was the same ethic that left Giblin 'happy' when his sister announced her intention to be a missionary.<sup>10</sup>

If Giblin's spiritual education had left an imprint, Giblin's secular education was also pressed. Colonial Tasmania – contrary to common presumption – excelled in humane inquiry, and prospered as a consequence of its official connections in that regard. Dr Thomas Arnold of Rugby school fame had, at the solicitation of his friend the Governor, Sir John Franklin, taken pains from afar to nurture the seed of education in the infant society. Franklin himself founded the Scientific Society, whose journal *Tasmanian Journal of Natural Science* was of 'astonishing competence' (Serle 1973). In 1844, Franklin's vice-regal successor founded the Royal Society of Tasmania, the oldest Royal Society outside Great Britain. The

<sup>8</sup> Would his virtuous father also have been shocked? Another lifelong memory hints at a difference in temperament between father and son. Giblin had been climbing bull-oak trees at Browns River for birds' nests. 'I had made up an apocryphal story, which I thought very funny, depending upon a confusion of 'Bull-oak' and 'bloke', which Father received very coldly. (The chilly reception must have made a deep impression)' (RBA LFG 11 November 1948).

<sup>9</sup> 'If you can keep up the idea of calm reverence in an English church then you and I are made different. There are beautiful things in abundance of course. But never, not even at the Abbey, where conditions are most favourable, have I sat through it without being jarred in half-a dozen places; most of all by the general sinkage of all meaning before the exigencies of the music, and the miserable affected tones of the parson.' (RBA LFG 20 September 1892).

<sup>10</sup> Giblin in his old age held that Puritanism 'did something for people that was fine and big and you want to be able to appreciate it'.

arts also prospered. John Glover experienced a reinvigorated artistic impulse upon his arrival in Tasmania and benefited from the development in Hobart of 'an appreciative group of patrons of painting executed for the pleasure of local residents'. The Hobart Mechanics Institute, the oldest in Australia, gave lectures, entitled 'Perception of the Beautiful'. 'A tiny cultural elite was gathering and recognizing itself' (Serle 1973, p. 14).

The Tasmanian cultural elite sought a worthy education for its sons and found it in one of Franklin's posthumous but enduring bequests, the Hutchins School, which became the pre-eminent institution of education in Tasmania. Lynd was conspicuously bright – 'far cleverer' his father believed, than Lyndhurst's elder brother, who was to win a scholarship to Oxford.<sup>11</sup> Shortly before finally succumbing to heart disease at the age of 46, William Robert spoke of his own lack of education as his greatest regret in life. William Robert would not allow Lynd to be deprived of its benefit.

Giblin attended Hutchins between 1881 and 1889. He won all the prizes. He was Exhibitioner, Dry Scholar, and the sole 'Associate of Arts First Class'.<sup>12</sup> One other distinction won there proved of lifelong significance. In 1860 Tasmania's Council of Education had instituted an annual examination in imitation of the new 'local examinations' of Cambridge and Oxford. The best two candidates were awarded £200 per annum for four years to enable their attendance at a British university. In 1889 Giblin won.

Giblin enrolled in the University of London in 1890. Science was his focus. He studied Physics, Zoology and Comparative Anatomy, Mathematics, and Applied Mathematics and Mechanics. In the battle between Classics and Moderns, Giblin was evidently on the side of the Moderns. Within the university, intellectual leadership was centred in the driven, brilliant and somewhat eccentric figure of Karl Pearson<sup>13</sup> (or Carl Pearson as he was until a sojourn in Germany prompted him to germanicise his name). Pearson was just about to complete *The grammar of science* and coin the term 'standard deviation'. He was also a follower of the eugenic principles of his mentor Francis Galton and was committed to the idea

<sup>11</sup> In 1887 a future Vice-Chancellor of the University of Tasmania recorded in his diary: 'I see a good deal of Lyndhurst (Giblin) now. He certainly is a clever boy – and remarkably advanced for his age. He is now in my Bible class, and often surprises me by his grasp of things, which one would hardly expect a boy of 14 to have any ideas about' (Walker 1976, p. 46).

<sup>12</sup> In 1933 Giblin wrote to Hutchins school to oppose the erection of a school chapel (RBA LFG 27 October 1933). A little later he was to tell the headmaster of Geelong Grammar, Sir James Darling, that he was irritated by the school's Anglican Service. To his amusement Darling replied: 'Well all I can see is for you to come and be school chaplain. I don't mind what your religion is' (RBA LFG 4 April 1935).

<sup>13</sup> Giblin was invited to attend Pearson's funeral service in 1936.

that procreation should utilise superior stock, and superior stock were largely determined by physique. Giblin studied under the direction of Pearson and these eugenic principles lingered in Giblin's mind.<sup>14</sup>

After three years Giblin left the University of London without a degree and entered Kings College, Cambridge. What occasioned this move is unknown. Perhaps the good offices of Pearson, a Kingsman, assisted him.

At King's Giblin was happy. Many years later he composed an affectionate memoir: 'A Day at Cambridge. Lent Term, King's College, 189-'. It is a description of a busy round of simple pleasures: his favourite beer, launching a row boat on the Cam among the snow flakes, singing in a college where 'every second man had his piano'.<sup>15</sup> It is almost cosy.

He later traced his acquisition of his musical tastes back to King's.<sup>16</sup> But the life of the mind is almost absent from this memoir. He reports attending a lecture by 'a very distinguished mathematician but the worst lecturer in the world'. The impression is that the high points are fellowship, not thought. The excellence Giblin pursued was physical. Six feet tall and weighing 14 stone (Earp 1960), Giblin was a star on the rugby football field. He played for Kings, the University XV, and then became a 'famous International' playing for England. But he left Cambridge with second class honours.<sup>17</sup>

In considering his record at Cambridge the issue that comes to mind is the lost opportunity for the future economist. In the 1890s Cambridge was the foremost centre in the world for the theoretical study of economics. A Moral Sciences Tripos (that is, a social sciences degree) had been established since 1851, and reformed in 1889. A chair had existed since 1828 and was now filled by Alfred

<sup>14</sup> It is significant that an early issue of the *Economic Record* includes a savage and absurd eugenicist plea by the first teacher of economics at the University of Tasmania, Jethro Brown. He declares: 'Rational selection may supplement the operation of natural selection. I do not mean to suggest that a scientist should go around with an axe and a bath, smashing half the men and drowning half the women. Such loose measures might attain good results. But that sort of thing is not done in polite society' (Brown 1927). Polite society could, however, make a medical certificate of 'fitness to marry' a compulsory prerequisite for marriage and arrange 'the segregation or sterilisation of obviously defective types'. The fact that Brown also recommends a 'living wage' and 'child endowment' (as means of encouraging the fit to breed) is a reminder that eugenics was a thing of hope for 'progressives' of the period.

<sup>15</sup> Giblin records his dissatisfaction at the beef served at King's. He explains its poor quality by the fact that rural tenants of King's were allowed to pay their rent in kind, rather than cash. 'Under these circumstances it was to be expected that the College would get what the market rejected'.

<sup>16</sup> His musical tastes were 'romantic': the later Beethoven, Brahms, Sibelius.

<sup>17</sup> Or, more properly, 'Senior Optime'. Giblin took his BA in 1896. He waited until 1928 to convert it to an MA.

Marshall, who was rolling out courses on production, distribution, free trade and protection. There was a demand for students with the capacity for analytical thought. And Marshall was glad for 'postgraduates' (such as Giblin was) to take the Moral Sciences Tripos. J. N. Keynes, the father of J. M. Keynes, was one such postgraduate who did.

But Giblin did not take the Moral Sciences Tripos, and he did not come to the attention of Marshall.

Cambridge did, nevertheless, bestow on Giblin one prize of an intellectual character: an entrée into one of most powerful cultural coteries of the 20th century - Bloomsbury. But the initial connection was not through any acquaintances at King's, or even Cambridge.<sup>18</sup> Instead, it came through a circuitous route beginning with a London literary figure who never attended Cambridge, E. V. Lucas (1868–1938). An essayist and *Punch* humorist, Lucas attended the University of London in Giblin's last year, and presumably here their lifelong friendship was formed. Lucas also presumably introduced Giblin to his collaborator Edward Garnett (1868–1937), who was to become another of Giblin's friends. A few years older than Giblin, Garnett had already established himself in London as a thoroughly modern *auteur* of socialism, Fabianism, Nietzscheanism. On the lookout for any new creative spirit, Garnett and Lucas had become the 'agents', patrons, editors and friends of Henry Lawson, then struggling in London, and whom Garnett felt was a 'scandalously neglected' talent. Another neglected talent was Dostoevsky, whom Garnett, with his wife Constance, largely introduced to the English reading public.

Edward and Constance had a son, David, or 'Bunny', later to loom large in the lives of Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell. Born in 1892, the infant David 'loved' Giblin, whose visits were encouraged by distant family connections. Garnett recalled a walking party of 1897 composed of his parents, aunts and uncles, Prince Kropotkin – Constance was a dedicated supporter of Russian revolutionaries – and Giblin. Giblin 'sat listening silently to my mother's exposition of Russian politics and revolutionary aims' sipping a mug of strong

<sup>18</sup> During Giblin's residence the only figure at King's with any connections with Bloomsbury was G. Lowes Dickinson, who Giblin later counted as a friend. A classicist and historian, Dickinson is most remembered today for his apologia for homosexuality. 'For those who like young men ...', wrote Dickinson, 'Cambridge, especially King's, is ideal'. Throughout his life Giblin did, literally, like young men. The extent to which he liked them in the more specific Dickinsonian sense is little more than conjecture. The hale spirit of Giblin's memoir of Cambridge is a world removed from the tremulous and incensed atmosphere of Dickinson's *Autobiography*. But the milieu in which he moved at Cambridge was largely homosexual. As he told his wife forty years later: 'Most of my old acquaintance in Cambridge – James, Macauley, Dickinson etc. were rather monastic and only politely interested in women' (RBA LFG 29 June 1932).

Westerham ale. 'There was a strength and repose about Giblin, even as a young man, which set one immediately at rest. Hurry of any sort and the urgent petty occupations of daily life were in his presence, revealed as unnecessary and futile. There was any amount of time for things that mattered ...' (Garnett 1953, p. 33).<sup>19</sup>

Twenty years later, in 1917, it was Giblin's friendship with the adult Bunny, oiled by the reassuring fact of Giblin's King's College education, that was to prise open the door to Bloomsbury. But in 1897 all Cambridge had left Giblin with warm memories and a second class honours degree. What to do now? An excursion abroad would have been a not atypical graduate's answer. And a typical choice in the 1890s might be Heidelberg, Athens, or even India. Giblin chose otherwise. On July 14 1897 the *Excelsior* docked in San Francisco, and unloaded \$500 000 of gold. The rumours of a fabulous gold reef in Canada's northern extremities had suddenly been proved true. The Klondike gold rush was on and 100 000 men from across the world rushed to Canada to fight their way to the most distant reaches of British Columbia. Giblin was among them. He told five-year-old Bunny that he would bring him back four golden chairs.

He was accompanied to Canada by an Australian-born fellow student and fellow spirit, Martin Grainger (1874–1941). Grainger, declared Giblin, 'is one of the most remarkable people I have met' (RBA LFG 11 April 1896). He had secured the First in mathematics at Cambridge that had eluded Giblin, but was leaving the opportunity of academic preferment for the rigours of the wilderness, and this choice remained unrevised throughout life.<sup>20</sup>

The pair reached Canada on a cattle boat; 'an experience which gives those who undergo it a fairly close acquaintance with many things not learned in books'. Once there Giblin did not find gold, and perhaps never much sought to.<sup>21</sup> He did, however, seek to find survivors. In their search for wealth, many miners had been reduced to total destitution. The Canadian 'North Country' where they

<sup>19</sup> Garnett notes that Giblin was reading *Beavis: The story of a boy* 'with profound attention for the fourth time'. This novel of the nature mystic Richard Jefferies is a 'celebration of the vigour and freedom of a childhood spent in the countryside' (S. M. Coleman, 'The Life and Work of Richard Jefferies', <http://www.arthur-ransome.org/ar/literary/bevis.htm>). Years later Giblin was to tell his sister Edith that 'copies of Bevis are in continued flow through my hands' (RBA LFG 9 April 1934).

<sup>20</sup> It is recorded that Giblin breached protocol on the occasion of his being presented to King George VI; he did not wear gloves. It is also recorded that Grainger, too, breached convention when he was presented to the same King. He wore moccasins.

<sup>21</sup> His fellow Kingsman F.R. Earp stated that Giblin and Grainger 'bought a concession on which there was certainly gold, but most of the money went on the purchase but not enough on the machinery to work it, so their funds were exhausted and the concession lapsed before it paid' (Earp 1960, p. 17).

sought riches is cruel and relentless country. Devil's Gorge, Hell's Gate, Rapid of the Drowned: these are its features. Of the thousands who set out for the Klondike by the overland route beginning at Edmonton, only 20 per cent finished the journey. Not one of the 4000 horses they took with them did. And in winter the countryside was almost totally impassable. The sporadic supply trails of summer ceased. To survive was to kill whatever was still living: moose, wolf, porcupine, squirrel. And if you did not – by inexperience, exhaustion, or folly – you died. In early spring of 1899, in a tale worthy of King Croesus, gold miners along the banks of the Dease and Liard rivers were snowed in, trapped and starving. The government of British Columbia dispatched a rescue party, with Giblin second in command. Travelling by dog teams, the rescue party successfully negotiated frozen lakes, located the survivors and provided an ambulance for those too weak to walk. On the return journey, with Giblin now in command, their food supplies gave out. A moose hunt preserved them from dearth and disaster.

Giblin's adventures in the Yukon bring out in bold profile several of his characteristics. It highlighted his aptitude for leadership – not an *ambition* for leadership – but simply a capacity for it.

His adventures also brought out his willingness to undertake selfless acts, which complemented his leadership. And they brought out the satisfaction he felt as a result of defying physical misery. Or, perhaps more truthfully, his satisfaction from defying it more better than could any other. 'The temperature was a brisk 38° below zero but Grainger and Giblin seemed to enjoy such temperatures'. Indeed, 'there were occasions when they deliberately went out in the coldest weather to prove to themselves that they could take the worst' (Camsell 1960, p. 25). One morning Giblin arrived at base with the cheerful report that overnight the temperature had dropped to -52° (= -47° C).

In the Yukon Giblin also received the education provided by hardship. On one occasion later in life Giblin announced that 'to be any good, an economist ought to have been hungry in his youth' (Hyttén 1971, p. 53). This is surely an unreliable test – most of the best economists would have failed it. But Giblin honestly passed it.

Finally, the Yukon allowed the young Giblin to boldly articulate his self-definition. He was Viking. At Cambridge he had become engrossed by the Icelandic saga, *Burnt Njal*. It was 'as good as the Iliad'. He visited Iceland (Reynolds c. 1951) and appears to have learnt the language and translated parts of its literature.

The Icelandic sagas are myths without mystical mist. They are chronicles of bargains and combat. They tell of Hallgerda ('fair of face and tall of growth', but evil at heart) and, as her counterpart, the good, if sexless, Unna. They celebrate Gunnar: hardy, fearless, hot in battle, but ardent for peace. 'In all the

long series of quarrels that are thrust upon him', commented Giblin in a public lecture on the sagas, 'through all the onslaughts that are made and ambushes set, there is only one occasion where he is not ready to make peace' (Giblin [1923] 1960). And Gunnar is wise. He was set apart from those men beholden by 'swift certainty as to what they wanted and how to get it'. Gunnar was given to 'care and anxious thought', 'a persistent struggle to see mankind through, knowing they would lose the last fight'.

Giblin's passage of youth in the frontier country of Canada afforded a tangible fulfilment of his northman fantasy. It so happened that several of the remote outposts of the Hudson Bay Company were supplied by means of row boats. Giblin, with Grainger, successfully presented himself as an oarsman to the company. He now had his own long boat. A hollowed spruce tree was his vessel. A single spruce tree was his huge oar.

At the conclusion of several months oarsmanship, he extended his mariner fantasy even further by training as a seaman. But this disappointed him. The steamship had removed the elements of nature he so loved from seafaring.

But at the same time Giblin had decided against Canada.

This country is not a bad one to knock about in; the North particularly, but it has no conscience and that gets on one's nerves after a time ... it's when they pretend to be a community, the absence of any common feeling or idea becomes glaring. The majority confess a most brazen dollars and cents criterion of every question, and the most decent minority are cynics. And political morality in the narrower sense is as shameful I believe, as the worst that the [United] States can show, with the absence of any bills and success to palliate it. I believe Australia is better; that it has a touch of conscience and glimmerings of an idea; at least there is a chance of it, without the juggernaut of American material success to crush and the charybides of English immobility to engulf. (RBA LFG February 1903).

He sailed from Vancouver to Port Phillip, where he piloted his vessel through dangerous waters. In Hobart he returned to his true vocation, and became a foundation master in the King's School, a breakaway school from Hutchins. It was, perhaps, a financial crisis at the school that set him roving again. He returned to London through Java, where he fell in again with Martin Grainger, and together they pursued a new interest: Ju-Jitsu.

The 'gentle art' of Ju-Jitsu had left the Japanese countryside with the dissolution of the samurai and had spread to Japanese towns in search of custom, and from there to the world beyond. Europe received its first exposure to Ju-Jitsu in 1899, when the 18-year-old Yukio Tani arrived in England to entertain musical halls audiences by challenging all comers. A minor craze ensued, with even Conan

Figure 1.1. Giblin (bearded), among 'The Elect', on his return from British Columbia



Source: RBA PN002639

Doyle having Holmes practising his own anglicised version. Tani established a 'Japanese School of Ju-Jitsu' in London in association with Giblin and Grainger. 'They had fitted up a gymnasium in the basement of a house in Gordon Square, where they gave lessons and held exhibitions. At the latter, Giblin sometimes took the part of the heavy man who could be thrown and reduced to helplessness by a Japanese half of his weight' (Garnett 1953, p. 111).

Giblin and Grainger edited the guide, *The game of Ju-Jitsu. For the use of schools and colleges*. It is more than a manual: it is a piece of advocacy. Ju-Jitsu, say the authors, furnishes health – 'not the timid health that is content to avoid sickness, but the health that is alive and rampant'. Its special merit, however, is as a sport. Cricket, football and rowing require space unavailable to the 'town-bred boy'. Ju-Jitsu demands 'little space and no complicated apparatus' and is 'possible in the middle of town, indoors or out, by gaslight or daylight'. Boxing could claim the same but, although boxing is an 'admirable game', the interest in Ju-Jitsu is more demanding and intense: 'it stands to boxing as chess to draughts'. And 'hard hitting' knocks you about more than you like. With Ju-Jitsu, 'Man to man as God made you (usually with the addition of a jacket), you may fight it out to the inevitable finish; defeat when it comes is absolute, and the beaten man rises without strain or bruise ready to try gain. This is the peculiar glory of it' (Giblin in Miyaki and Tano 1906).

But however financially successful the judo partnership may have been, it could not withstand other criteria. Grainger wished to marry. And so Giblin took to sea once again.<sup>22</sup> As a consequence of a treaty of the imperial powers, the Solomon Islands had recently become open to economic exploitation. Lord Stanmore of the Pacific Islands Company engaged Giblin to further the company's coconut interests in the islands. 'So I swotted up agriculture, and then chartering a little steamer, I spent three months in the Solomons sailing around the coast line and examining the country and its possibilities' (*Table Talk*, 30 April 1931).<sup>23</sup> A virulent local fever forced him to leave.

He returned to Hobart, planted an apple orchard that he was to keep all his life, and began a career. His career was to be political. He joined the newly formed Liberal Democratic League. The aim of this party was to win the balance of power in Tasmania between the two larger parties – the Anti-Socialist Party and the Labor Party – and thereby 'force drastic financial reform' on the state's shaky finances. 'We urgently need more population, more revenue and less capital

<sup>22</sup> To smooth his marriage, Grainger decided to write a novel to pay off his creditors. Giblin was acquainted with another literary sea rover, Joseph Conrad. In February 1904 he records: 'Met Conrad in Kensington Gardens and talked for a while about his new book' (quoted in Copland 1960, p. 142). The 'new book' is presumably *Romance*. Or perhaps *Nostromo*, then still being written.

<sup>23</sup> Or was it a 'pearl trading venture'? (Garnett 1953, p. 111).

expenditure', Giblin declared. This was perhaps an electorally unpalatable nostrum by itself. But whatever modest chance Giblin had of election, he threw away with his stance on defence. At one public meeting during the 1909 election campaign it was moved that Australia should donate a Dreadnought to the Royal Navy, although at that time the Royal Australian Navy did not yet exist and Australian naval defence consisted of paying a Royal Navy squadron to base itself in Australia. Giblin moved an amendment suggesting that Australia give first priority to its own defence of its own waters. It is recorded that Giblin had some difficulty in finding a seconder amongst the 'uproar and yells from the audience inviting him to sit down' (Green 1960, p. 30).

The Liberal–Democrat League failed. The Anti-Socialists won a majority in the 1909 election; the League secured just one seat out of 30, and only 9.7 per cent of the overall vote. In the seat he was contesting, Giblin received just 5 per cent.

The Liberal–Democrat League vanished and its members attached themselves to either the Anti-Socialists or the Australian Labor Party. Giblin immediately chose the Labor Party.<sup>24</sup> A fruitful but difficult association had begun, one that was to bring him into close contact with future leading political personalities – including J. A. Lyons and John Curtin.

Why did he join the Labor Party? To join the conservatives was impossible. There was nothing 'Tory' about Giblin. But joining the ALP was possible. He sympathised with the working-class movement; the Tasmanian Labor Party had been founded in the same Working Men's Club that his father had founded. He had, of course, worked as a lumberjack, sailor, teamster, boatman and cook. On a more programmatic level he had on his return to Tasmania founded an 'informal discussion group' of socialists, whose activities included sports meetings, picnics, lectures on current affairs and socialist doctrine. Its members included J. A. Lyons and John Curtin's future father-in-law, Abraham Needham, and presumably on occasions John Curtin himself, who Giblin would surely have met on Curtin's various visits to the island at that time.

It was in these years before the First World War that Giblin sported a 'flowing Socialist beard' (Reynolds c. 1951),<sup>25</sup> and declared himself a socialist virtually from birth. The meaning of 'socialist' was conveniently indefinite. His own conception of this doctrine allowed him to support private finance of infrastructure development: 'as good labour men, even as good socialists we cannot do better than support' it. (Green 1959. See also Robson 1983, vol. 1, p. 295). As a consequence, 'His socialism, though never his intelligence, was always

<sup>24</sup> More correctly, the Workers Political League, as the Labor Party was styled in Tasmania until 1918.

<sup>25</sup> The beard survived until his entraining for France in 1916. The King's Regulations put an end to it.

open to question' (Davis 1975, p. 415). But this questioning did not necessarily isolate him from the most powerful elements in the party; in 1910 an attempt to incorporate a 'socialisation objective' into Labor's constitution was defeated. Labor instead pledged itself to 'the cultivation of an Australian sentiment, the maintenance of a White Australia and the development in Australia of an enlightened and self-reliant community', all issues Giblin distinctly supported.

Giblin managed to avoid a 'probation period' that certain Labor stalwarts wished to impose on him. A more enduring difficulty in his new political association lay in Giblin's distance from the 'industrial wing' of the Labor Party.<sup>26</sup> Giblin sympathised with the working-class movement. He was soon to provide advice on the 1910 Tasmanian *Factories Act* and the *Wages Board Act*, that put a minimum on some wage rates, and a maximum of 48 hours on the working week, at a time when waitresses in Hobart 'coffee palaces' were working up to 84 hours a week (Robson 1983, vol. 2, p. 233). But, like his father, he took a 'missionary' attitude to the working class. They were to be 'raised', not rallied to. And his aspirations were far wider, more social than economic. In 1911 Giblin declared the party did not need men only concerned with wages.

In summary, Giblin was a typical 'left-liberal' of the pre-1914 world. He favoured equality, and opposed hierarchy and mere convention. This made him 'left'. But he was committed to the prerogative of the individual over the prerogative of the collective. This made him 'liberal'. The key figure in this mindset was J. S. Mill. A representative figure was Alfred Wallace, the evolutionist and land nationaliser, who had links to founding figures in the Tasmanian labour movement (Coleman 2001a). Giblin was deciding his political affiliation during a time when Australia laboured under a strict two-party system, with no centre party savouring of Mill, and the defining political axis was simply supporting – or opposing – the new insurgent Labor Party. Giblin could only support.

He became active in Labor Party deliberations. He pressed for the staged nationalisation of land; voluntary voting; proportional representation;<sup>27</sup> uniform divorce laws; an increased number of states. He also proposed a motion for the

<sup>26</sup> At the time of his joining the Labor Party, Giblin's distance from the industrial wing was no problem – there was no 'industrial wing' in Tasmania. There were no trade union delegates at the party conference until 1912. There was not even a Trades and Labour Council in Tasmania until 1909. The stock mythology of the Labor Party's foundation – of strikers and black stumps – does not capture the reality in Tasmania. There the 'industrial wing' was created by the 'political wing', rather than the other way around.

<sup>27</sup> Giblin was 'thoroughly immersed' in proportional representation, and a member of the Select Committee of 1915 that ushered the new electoral scheme into Tasmania (Green 1956, p. 78). At the end of his life Giblin was a member of another official inquiry into the vexed issue of proportional representation.

‘prevention of the marriage of Asiatics and Europeans and the marriage of idiots’.<sup>28</sup> We might see here the influence of eugenic doctrine. But his motion was also consistent with the outlook of the ALP of the time. In the same year, 1912, the Fisher Labor Government introduced the maternity allowance, but the legislation debarred ‘asiatic’ mothers from receiving it.<sup>29</sup>

The *Westralian Worker* reported that Giblin’s ‘sabre [was] the keenest and most pointed at the conference’ (*Westralian Worker* 9 February 1912).<sup>30</sup> In the Tasmanian election of January 1913 he successfully stood as a Labor Party candidate, topping the list of ALP candidates in the federal seat of Denison (Bennett and Bennett 1986), and became an advisor to the Treasurer J. A. Lyons in the subsequent minority Labor Government.

Giblin’s promising political trajectory was unbalanced by the arrival of the First World War. Giblin was not one of those who raced excitedly to the colours. It was, he said, a ‘bloody war’. In any case, a broken wrist from a bicycle accident had left him at the time a not very useful warrior. But with its mend, and with the maximum age for enlistment raised to 45, he volunteered in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF).

What can be said about his war experience? That he was lucky to emerge alive; that he ‘should’ have been killed; and that some of his dearest friends had little expectation of his surviving.

What does his war experience reveal? Largely what the Yukon had already revealed, but in still more vivid hue. Above all a fulfilment achieved in being ‘in action’, in both the broad and narrow senses. Giblin was 43 years old when he volunteered, older than 98 per cent of the recruits to the AIF. From 1909 he had served in the Army Intelligence Corps as a ‘citizen soldier’.<sup>31</sup> An honourable and useful staff position would have been available. But he enlisted in an ordinary line unit: the 40th battalion, raised under the auspices of the Tasmanian Government, and manned and officered solely by Tasmanians.

<sup>28</sup> See pp. 32–4, ‘Proceedings of ALP Hobart January 1912’ (JCPML 00653/151/21). The motion was rejected on Fisher’s urging.

<sup>29</sup> Giblin put a low value on the maternity allowance. In the 1926 Royal Commission on National Insurance this exchange took place over the impact of the allowance on infant mortality:

*Giblin* : I should say the figures undoubtedly show that, judging from the mortality position and the diseases of the puerperal state with mothers, the maternity allowance has not been successful.

*Senator McDougall* : Then in your opinion, it has not been of economic value to the nation.

*Giblin* : It may have helped the doctors.

<sup>30</sup> JCPML 00653/150/5.

<sup>31</sup> Giblin had been judged as ‘officer material’ several years before by the military authorities (Barrett 1979).

Figure 1.2. Captain Giblin, still with 'socialist beard'



Source: RBA PN002638

He was first severely wounded on 15 April 1917 near Armentieres (Green 1960). At the field hospital he genially entreated the authorities to send him back to the front, rather than to medical care in England. The medical officer turned out to be one of his former fellow students from Cambridge, and granted his request. A few weeks later, in the battle of Messines of June 1917, he was awarded a Military Cross for leading his men 'with great determination to the assault, reaching his objective through intensive artillery and machine gun fire'. In the assault he was severely wounded a second time, and dispatched to England.

In this island sanctuary, Giblin pursued other areas of life. Bunny Garnett was now 25, a conscientious objector, and required by law to contribute to the war effort through agricultural labour. To conform with this requirement, he and a fellow objector (and one-time lover) Duncan Grant were now sharing the Sussex farmhouse 'Charleston' with Vanessa Bell in their own version of a *ménage-a-trois*. Giblin 'full of warmth and friendliness' came during his convalescence to visit Garnett 'to reassure himself that I [Garnett] was not having too bad a time as a conscientious objector!'

He was very large, with close cropped hair, rugged features, tanned to pale mahogany, very slow in speech, and untidy in unbuttoned tunic and badly wound puttees. (Garnett 1953).

But how might these Bloomsbury lilies of the field react to the sudden appearance of this unknown bronzed warrior? 'Confronted by Vanessa ... with a sure instinct, he began to speak of his old friends at Cambridge, Lowes Dickinson, Wedd and Clapham'.<sup>32</sup>

There may have been another motive for Giblin's visit. John Maynard Keynes often frequented the Charleston household, which he had originally organised. Giblin, Garnett recalled, 'wanted to know all that we could tell' about Keynes whom he 'had heard about'. Giblin and Garnett dined and parted. 'Giblin's future did not seem likely to be a long one'.

Giblin returned to take part in the Battle of Passchendaele, a battle that illustrates, even more sombrely than the Somme, the vision of the War as being a matter of lives being squandered for a few miles. A village by the name of Passchendaele was to be taken, and 310 000 Allied casualties obtained it. Giblin's unit was thrown into the maelstrom, and at the end of battle he was the most senior surviving commander of the 40<sup>th</sup> battalion's 10th brigade. 'Of the Battalion there were only about a hundred left out of the six hundred who went into action eight days earlier. These men with Giblin at their head had reached the lowest

<sup>32</sup> J. H. Clapham (1873-1946) was an eminent economic historian, and close friend of Giblin at Cambridge. Nathaniel Wedd (1864-1940) was an influential fellow at King's College, and ally of his fellow 'Apostle' Lowes Dickinson.

depths of misery by the time they had arrived at the area of sodden shell-holes allotted to them. Giblin moved about them, quietly talking to the exhausted ones, and seeing that they had hot food and drink' (Green 1960).

The costs of battle encouraged attempts to clarify the purpose of the struggle. In October 1917 Giblin wrote to his Tasmanian Labor colleague James Ogden to argue that war aims should have no imperialistic dimension; that revolutionary Russia should receive a sympathetic treatment; and that Australia should place German New Guinea under international control (Lake 1975, p. 117). The winter and the subsequent spring of 1917, saw the nadir of morale among the Allied forces. Early in 1918 Giblin told the woman he would marry that the trial of Bertrand Russell for pacifism was 'incredible'.<sup>33</sup>

Three weeks leave in the summer of 1918 was devoted to Venus rather than Mars. Gunnar had found his Unna. On 29 July 1918 he married, in a registry office, Eilean Burton, 33 years old and 12 years his junior. They shared unorthodoxy. She had distinct artistic connections and was given to 'unconventional dress'. She was a carpenter, who made some of her own furniture. Educated at Wycombe Abbey School – housed in a magnificent mansion in 160 acres of grounds – she had devoted several years to social work in the East End of London. She considered herself a socialist and a feminist. At the marriage ceremony there was, on her plea, no wedding ring.<sup>34</sup> They are both recorded as living at Spencer Road, East Mosely, London.<sup>35</sup> Two 'eccentrics' had found each other, and remained constant, despite the impositions their unusual personalities made on each other. One acquaintance of the pair has judged that 'She was as likeable as he was. They were a fine couple with a narcissistic devotion to each other'.<sup>36</sup>

During their honeymoon, Giblin with Eilean, visited Charleston a second time. And this time he caught Keynes.

<sup>33</sup> Russell had studied at Trinity College, Cambridge (1890–94), and remained a lecturer until 1901. Giblin had a role in Russell's tour of Australia in 1950.

<sup>34</sup> To be more exact: she would not have a ring if Lyndhurst did not have a ring. On their arrival in Hobart in 1919 Lyndhurst's mother was distressed by the ringless finger, and Eilean relented.

<sup>35</sup> Family legend relates that 'Eilean's and Lynd's marriage was very "sudden" to say the least'. But they had met before. In one account she arrived in Tasmania in 1913 intending to be a shearer's cook, and was directed to Lyndhurst at Seven Mile Beach. In another account their meeting is both more fortuitous and more foreseeable. 'Some years before 1914 Eilean had some job in Hobart, and she never could stand many foolish folk and their chatter. Eilean then used to go off on her own at weekends and camp in some wild part of Tasmania. There she met a bloke who also got bored with silly people and their idle talk, and he also used to get away alone and go camping. And that was that' (RBA, letter of K. M. Burton to Desmond Giblin).

<sup>36</sup> James Cumes PKT Mailing List Archive 27 November 2000.

**Figure 1.3. Eilean Giblin (second from left) with Australian suffragettes, Rome 1923**



Source: nla pic-vin 3279316

I remember that we talked about his 'Gold' article in the *Economic Journal* in 1914 though at the time I was not even on the outer fringes of economic learning. (Giblin 1946).

Within days he was returned to the front to be part of the final advances of the summer of 1918. On 8 August 1943 he was to recall:

On this day 25 years ago the Australians and the Canadians made their great push which was the beginning of the end of the last war. I came back from leave (in England) that day and met the swarms of prisoners trailing back as I went to join my unit – on new ground, not pocked marked by shell holes or belted with barbed wire. It seemed a new world.

On 9 August he wrote to his bride: 'Just back in time for this push. It has been wonderful. We are in 6 miles' (NLA LFG 9 August 1918). He added that 'Fritz generally appears to be clearing out', and there had been 'very few casualties'. One of the few was himself. In a night attack in the battle of Bapaume of August 1918 Giblin was seriously wounded for a third time.<sup>37</sup> On the arrival of the Armistice he was convalescing in England.

In two years Giblin had been promoted to the rank of Major, awarded with both a Military Cross and a Distinguished Service Order (a decoration superior to the Military Cross) and had been 'Mentioned in Dispatches'. It was an illustrious record. But this military man was anti-militarist. He opposed conscription. He was, in a loose sense, a pacifist, desolated by the waste of war and disgusted by its misrepresentation as anything other than a grim necessity. In 1934 he publicly protested at the Governor of Victoria appearing in military uniform.

We are pledged to outlaw war, and we require the King's representative to dress as an outlaw. We ... are still suffering the dire effects of the last war. Yet when we are out to give a people's welcome to the King's representative ... we are in effect not only lauding warfare, as the lordliest life on earth but painting it with the outworn colours of gay and gallant chivalry. (Quoted in Copland 1960, p. 130).

To Giblin war was the colour of dust.<sup>38</sup> Gunnar now put aside his helm, sword and bill and sought peaceful employment.

<sup>37</sup> This would cause him considerable discomfort. It is characteristic that he attributed this mostly to the anaesthetic.

<sup>38</sup> Giblin's aversion to merely 'artistic truth' left him aloof from some pacifist literature. '*All quiet on the Western front* is selling well here' he told Eilean in 1929. 'There's no doubt about its merits but I doubt its truth as a normal picture – which the notices of it seem to suggest. The frequency of mangled bodies seen in great detail is very much overdone; the general tone is suitable enough for an occasional day or two when everything went wrong; but it is difficult to believe that German morale could have stood the continued strain that the book presents' (RBA LFG 12 July 1929).

He was 46. His father – Treasurer, Premier, Acting Governor, and Chief Justice – had died at that age, and on the afternoon of his funeral Hobart had largely closed to show its respect (Walker 1976, p. 39). Giblin had achieved little in public life by this time. To fulfil his aspirations the obvious remedy would be to revive the career as Labor parliamentarian that had been interrupted fewer than three years earlier. But the party had changed in that short time. It had split and radicalised. The prosecution of the war had been used to drive the Labor party into opposition seats. Their adversaries had claimed the war and army for themselves and the ALP seemed ready to concede both. At their 1918 conference the party had adopted the proposition that the war had been caused by capitalism. Major Giblin DSO, MC might not have cut amongst the delegates quite the figure a ‘war hero’ might have been expected to.<sup>39</sup>

Another consideration was the novel experience of the ALP’s annihilating defeat in the federal elections 1917. ‘This marked the end of the first era in labour history during which its [the ALP] support grew in leaps and bounds, when its opponents had to sink their differences, adopt its methods and match its program, and when it seemed set to become the natural party of government. In the next twenty-five years Labor would hold office at the national level once, for twenty-sixth months’ (Hirst 1999, p. 76).

Finally, might the example of Keynes have suggested a new way of advancing what Giblin thought important? Keynes the economist, public servant and ‘public intellectual’ had made a greater splash than most politicians. This kind of public life also presented itself to Giblin. Giblin had previously advised Sir Neil Lewis, Premier of Tasmania. Lewis was now Treasurer in the Nationalist Government of Tasmania, and he wanted Giblin as the new Statistician of Tasmania.<sup>40</sup>

## Brigden

While Major Giblin DSO, MC was recuperating in England, one Private Brigden was also recovering from a severe gunshot wound. The similarity ceases there.

James Bristock Brigden’s youth contrasts strongly with Giblin’s. Giblin was Cambridge-educated; a Premier’s son; a star of international rugby meets. Brigden was the son of a tram conductor. A primary education was his sole schooling. Sport was an indulgence he could not manage.

He was born 20 July 1887 in Maldon, a Victorian goldrush town that once boasted 60 hotels and three theatres, but whose seam of luck was fully exhausted by the

<sup>39</sup> It is worth noting that two of Giblin’s senior peers in the Tasmanian ALP were to leave it not long after. James Ogden was expelled from the Labor Party, joined the Nationalists, and later the UAP. Lyons defected from the ALP to the UAP in 1931.

<sup>40</sup> The last ALP conference Giblin appears to have attended was October 1919. Giblin took up his duties as Statistician soon thereafter, which would have precluded any more political activities.

time of James's appearance. Restless and intelligent, Brigden left this small opportunityless town, but lacking skills he drifted. He became a cabin boy; the *SS Wilcannia* took him to London where he found himself 'stranded in the east end of London in a bad winter, as one of the unemployed' (JBB to DBC 26 September 1922).<sup>41</sup> He suffered 'a good deal of hardship' (Hyttén 1971).

'Somewhat embittered' by this experience, on his return to Australia he became one of the founders of the new Shop Assistants Union.<sup>42</sup> After hearing Ramsay MacDonald speak in Melbourne in 1906, he devoted himself to 'active participation in the vigorous political life of the time and to intensive reading in political and economic subjects'. He became a participant in Labor Party activities and a delegate to the State Conference of the Victorian Political Labor Council in 1914 and 1915.<sup>43</sup> But his ideological affiliation was to 'radicalism' rather than 'socialism'. Like Giblin he was drawn to equality, but not to the collective. Hope lay in the development of the individual potential and virtues – including ethical sensibilities – regardless of social background (Whitwell 1986, p. 76). He could have been described as a wage-earning 'bourgeois radical'.

In order to 'get way from wage earning' he began poultry farming, although without leaving Labor politics.<sup>44</sup> He subsequently entered the ice business and witnessed the monthly price-fixing meeting of the relevant combine, the Melbourne Ice Traders Association, who were themselves injured by the monopoly prices the ice manufacturers charged. Brigden became an enthusiastic advocate of the (unsuccessful) 1911 referendum to give the Commonwealth Parliament power to nationalise any industry considered a monopoly. He also supported the unsuccessful 1913 referendum to extend Commonwealth powers to industrial relations.

After a disastrous fire destroyed his business, he turned to 'political journalism' as his 'enduring ambition'. Little came of the ambition apart from a few contributions to *Labor Call* (the organ of the Political Labor Council of Victoria). At the outbreak of war he was living with his parents, and 'driving a team of horses around Melbourne' (Hyttén 1971).

<sup>41</sup> Copy of the letter in the possession of the authors.

<sup>42</sup> The minutes of a meeting of the Shop Assistants Union of Victoria on 30 December 1907 record Brigden as a member of the committee. On 28 April 1908 he tendered his resignation from the union on the grounds that he was no longer 'in the trade'.

<sup>43</sup> According to one obituary (probably written by Colin Clark), it was during this time that Brigden 'apparently' had contact with Giblin, presumably at Labor conferences. ('J. B. Brigden', *Economic News*, December 1950)

<sup>44</sup> Not surprisingly, Brigden opposed in 1915 an attempt to exclude employers from membership of the Labor Party (*Labor Call* 4 March 1915).

It was a world war that shook society's circumstances and presumptions sufficiently to loose Brigden from their constriction.

Brigden enlisted in the 29th Battalion in October 1915. This enlistment raises an interesting query. Not long before Sarajevo, Brigden had dismissed in print the struggle between the Entente and the Central Powers as no more than a British attempt to preserve a privileged position in world trade against a German resolve to break this 'monopoly' by force. Adopting the voice of some future historian chronicling events of the world war that already seemed inevitable, Brigden wrote: 'And because Austrian success was intolerable, Russia intervened. Because Russia attacked, Germany fought. Because Germany fought, France also. Because German success would be dangerous to her interests. Each for himself, His Trade, His Markets, His Profits, His Vested Interests, His Country, Right or Wrong' (*Labor Call*, 7 January 1912). Selfish capitalism, he believed, was the source of war and conflict.

Neither would Brigden have had any illusions about the conditions of battle. The Australian War Memorial writes of the recruits to the 29th battalion: 'Having enlisted as part of the recruitment drive that followed the landing at Gallipoli, and having seen the casualty lists, these were men who had offered themselves in full knowledge of their potential fate'.

But the first year of the war saw broad solidarity in favour of the war. The Labor Party supported the war. The union press also supported it. So did the *Bulletin*. It appears that something like a remarkable 60 per cent of Australian males between 25 and 29-years-old volunteered.<sup>45</sup>

Some years later Brigden reflected on how joining up seemed to have changed his course of life for the better:

Up to the war I hadn't much luck, rather the contrary ... but since some strange benefactor of a Bosche ... sent a piece of German lead through me I haven't been able to stop it. (Quoted in Roe 1991).

In August 1916 a less welcome piece of German lead had killed his younger brother, David, 19-years-old.<sup>46</sup> James Brigden's own fortunate 'benefaction' came on 23 March 1917. The 29th battalion had occupied the village of Baumetz in the wake of the German withdrawal to the Hindenburg line. At 4.30 am a German artillery barrage portended a counterattack. Brigden found himself on the crest of a sunken road with his comrades facing an advancing enemy

<sup>45</sup> 589 947 men offered themselves for military service (Beaumont 2001, p. 110), and 21 per cent of AIF recruits were aged 25–29, the age bracket that Brigden fell in. The 1911 census counted 200 000 males aged 25–29. Twenty-one per cent of 589 947 approximately equals 60 per cent of 200 000.

<sup>46</sup> David Brigden was one of 11 000 Australian casualties suffered in an unsuccessful attempt to storm Mouquet Farm.

encirclement. The Germans broke through the rear and reached the village. A message escaped from the embattled village: the '29th has been cut to pieces' (Austin 1997). In fact, the battalion had survived. And so had Brigden. But a gunshot wound had 'entered his chest and terminated his active career'.

By 'the merest fluke in the drafting of stretcher cases at an English port' Brigden spent his long convalescence in a hospital in Oxford. One of the volunteer assistants there was a Mrs Edwin Cannan, wife of the eminent economist Professor Edwin Cannan. Impressed by the 'slant of his conversation and occasional writing', Professor Cannan became a patron. So did another Goliath of Oxonian political economy, and another of Brigden's eminent hospital visitors, Professor F. Y. Edgeworth. Edgeworth became, in Brigden's words, one of his 'academic foster parents' (Brigden 1926), who (like Cannan) gave him personal tuition.<sup>47</sup> Brigden later recalled that he 'owed greatly' to the theorist.

Brigden guessed that they had welcomed him as a 'raw non-public school man in Oxford'. Brigden undervalued himself and his mentors. His value to them went much further than his being 'non-public school'. The fluent, economical and orderly prose of this novice would have impressed any teacher. His sincerity and kindness would win many audiences over his life. And, perhaps, the fact that he was obviously a frustrated talent appealed to their sense of patronage.

Brigden 'became and remained an enthusiastic Cannanite'. Cannan's anomalous mixture of doctrinal conservatism and doctrinal criticism seems to have been a powerful example to the young Brigden. A similar example was provided by Edgeworth, an exponent of neoclassical economics, who (in Brigden's words) 'no heterodoxy could shock' (Brigden 1926).

With the assistance of the dons, a Soldier's Scholarship and Army leave, Brigden was admitted to Oriel College, Oxford, and obtained a diploma in political science, subsequently converted to a BA by a further year of study in law.

Oxford did not diminish his identification as a 'Radical' in politics. He attended a Labour Party rally of 12 000 people at the Albert Hall in London and appears to have gained the acquaintance of certain leading British Labour figures, including the pacifistically inclined Arthur Henderson, who had resigned his cabinet post in 1917 over Britain's refusal to negotiate with Germany. 'I spent the day of the famous 1918 election in his constituency, and his opponent romped home – with an effigy of the Kaiser hanging from the gallows of his motor car' (Brigden 1924).

Brigden's interests – reform, learning and labour – found an intersection in the Workers' Education Association, which he joined 'at once' in Oxford, and this

<sup>47</sup> Brigden took Edgeworth's courses on 'Currency and Banking', and 'Public Finance'. His Diploma in Economics is filled out with courses on government and law.

was to become a critical move for Brigden. In the short-term it would supply an income that was now especially needful: he had recently married Dorothy James, of Ide Hill, in the church of that picturesque village sitting at the highest point of Kent. It was perhaps with the assistance of Henry Clay of New College, whose experience in WEA classes had formed the basis of his incessantly reprinted text book, that secured for Brigden the appointment he needed. He would be the WEA Lecturer in the 'industrial areas' of Sheffield. It was presumably through this appointment that Brigden came to the attention of the founder and General Secretary of the WEA, Albert Mansbridge, a man who had already developed a keen interest in Australia.

Mansbridge had toured Australia in 1913, and from his memoirs it is clear that this was one of the great events of his life (Mansbridge 1920, pp. 47–50). In 138 speeches – to universities, trade halls, and employers' federations – in Wollongong, Ballarat, Broken Hill, Newcastle, Castlemaine, Geelong, Albany, and Kalgoorlie – Mansbridge and his wife fired enthusiasm for his schemes and won ample moral and financial support. The Workers Education Association in Australia bloomed, and its ties with its English parent were thick. One Antipodean bud lay in Tasmania. There the WEA was offering courses ranging over Economics, Psychology, Literature and Social Reconstruction, and in almost every settlement that could claim a town hall: Hobart, Launceston, Burnie, Deloraine, Gormanstown, Devonport, Ulverstone, Zeehan, Strahan, and the forlorn and bizarre mining outpost of Queenstown.

In 1921 a vacancy became available for a WEA lecturer in Queenstown, and Brigden applied.

## **Copland**

The son of a premier; the son of a bootmaker. The third member of the four, Douglas Berry Copland, was a child neither of the urban elite nor the provincial proletariat. He was the offspring of hardy and thriving Scottish pioneers on the Canterbury Plain in New Zealand.

Copland was born on 24 February 1894 to Presbyterian Scottish immigrants, Alex and Annie Copland. Their homestead had 50 draught horses and 16 children. Douglas was the 13th.

His background left its imprint. Throughout his life he boasted he could do most farming jobs. And all his life he was to be a pioneer, sowing and raising in barren land where no one had ventured before. And there remained something 'Scottish' about him – nimble and active, conscious of a pound, eager for self-improvement and education.

But his background could be no more than a background, as Copland's severe asthma was traced to an allergy to horses, and consequently husbandry was disqualified as an occupation. At the same time he felt insufficiently 'pious' for

the Ministry: solemnity was never characteristic of this man who 'loved a joke', especially shaggy dog stories. Perhaps teaching, then? He completed two years at Christchurch Teachers' Training College before enrolling in Canterbury College, part of the University of New Zealand. There he displayed the desire to occupy centre stage that was to become characteristic of him. He was an active member of the Christian Union; he was on the Student Association Executive; and was recognised as a Life Saver.

Two circumstances pushed him from the still waters of teacher-trainedom into more vigorous currents. Firstly, he came to the notice of Professor (Sir) James Hight (1870-1958), the leading figure of New Zealand academia in the first half of the twentieth century. A scholar, teacher and institution builder, Hight was endowed with remarkable confidence and vision. Born in New Zealand, and only making his first visit to Europe at the age of almost 60, he never assigned himself a junior status, and confidently believed that he was part of an international mission to uphold and cultivate a universal civilisation. 'It would be only a little fanciful to say that he held Richelieu and Mazarin barely less significant for New Zealand than the Maori seafarers and Edward Gibbon Wakefield' (NZDB). Encyclopedic in reach, multi-disciplinary in method, he lectured and published on the Maori Wars, law, and geography. He did not neglect economics. He had striven to create a Bachelor of Commerce at the university early in the 1900s. In 1909 he appointed himself to the newly created chair of history and economics. He was an inspiration, model and mentor to Douglas. It was he who insisted – almost compelled – Douglas to switch from mathematics to economics (Copland 1950).

The second circumstance was the world conflagration which ignited in Douglas's 20th year. Several of his brothers were serving in the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, and his immediate younger brother, Robert Davie, was killed in action in 1916. Indeed, 42 per cent of men of 'military age' served in the NZEF.<sup>48</sup> Douglas Berry Copland also sought to enrol but was rejected as medically unfit due to a lesion in his heart muscle. This setback 'greatly unsettled' him – he was never able to meet his thwarted will with equanimity. He found distraction by busying himself with a Census. But the war's ramifications would yet seek him out.

On the other side of the Tasman Sea, the war was straining emotions, and this was telling on the University of Tasmania. One Herbert Heaton had been recently appointed Lecturer in History and Economics thanks to the patronage of Albert Mansbridge (the post required lecturing and tutoring WEA classes). In August 1915 Heaton had 'provoked an outburst in the press and the parliament' when it was reported he had said that, as both the Allies and the Germans had

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.mch.govt.nz/heritage/nzww1.html>

presumably committed atrocities, a draw would be the best outcome of the war (Davis 1990, p. 70). Although Giblin sided with him, Heaton resigned from his post at the University of Tasmania in late 1916. The University of Tasmania advertised for a successor; the advertisement was pinned up on the noticeboard of Canterbury College.

I came in and saw this advertisement and I wasn't, well I was interested but I never thought for one moment of applying for it. But Doctor Hight came into the room where I was getting my gown to give my lecture and asked if I had seen this. And I told him that I had and in the discussion I explained that I didn't think I was up to the level to apply ... And he persuaded me to apply. (Copland 1968).

## Wilson

Wilson was 10 years younger than Copland, 17 years younger than Brigden and more than 30 years younger than Giblin. His short life previous to his meeting the other members of platoon requires little elaboration.

He was born on 7 April 1904 at Ulverstone, a settlement of 1129 people living in 219 dwellings in north-western Tasmania. His father was a builder of limited formal education, but possessed of 'an intelligent and inquisitive mind, and a sharp, if sardonic sense of humour' (Cornish 2002, p. 8). Roland was the second son of five boys.

At the age of 14, with the First World War sustaining the Edwardian enthusiasm for 'boy soldiers', he was inducted into junior military cadets, weighing just 25 kilograms. His slight build and short height were to remain a 'defining feature'. One later acquaintance recalled: 'My first impression, of course, as everybody's was of his diminutive stature' (Stone 1997, p. 5). The other members of the Platoon were tall: both Giblin and Brigden were six-footers. Roland Wilson in adulthood was scarcely five feet two inches tall (Cornish 2002 p. 7).

His stature did not prevent his success on the playing field. And his success there did not preclude even more in the schoolroom. Nominally Protestant, Wilson's formal education began at Ulverstone's convent school – the same which Giblin's political peer J. A. Lyons had attended. The boy was quick, and he won a bursary in the newly founded Devonport High School. In 1921 he gained the highest marks in Economics, Book-keeping, Geography and French, a feat which carried with it prizes in those four subjects. He also excelled in the state as a whole such that he was awarded the 'William Robert Giblin Scholarship', established in memory of Lyndhurst's father. Wilson was about to come to the attention of Lyndhurst.

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The First World War had been a social *super nova* that had blown apart old bonds, and scattered surviving materials. Four such fragments had been randomly thrown into proximity and were about to converge through the power of intellectual gravitation.